The Qur'an
and
World Peace

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Translator's Note

Man's most fundamental needs can be summed up as the need for *knowledge*, the need for *peace and harmony*, and the need for a *way to salvation*. That these needs have many degrees and modes and that they are closely related to one another cannot be denied. It is with these very questions that the Holy Qur'an — the last of the Divine Books — deals. Mostly people from outside look at it as a book containing some instructions about certain facts and principles of life and conduct. It, however, is not so. There are guiding principles regarding all vital issues, and one can unfold any number of valid interpretations.

Many of the best minds devoted to burning questions such as ecological problems, pollution, feeding of mankind, conquest of disease, bridging the gap between rich and poor and, in particular, world peace, have been inspired by the faith and tenets of Islam. And rightly so. Belief in One God brings us to believe in the oneness of mankind and on the unity of mankind is built the concept of human dignity and brotherhood. On the metaphysical-existential plane, many would concede today that true human happiness (in contradistinction to sensuous pleasure), mental peace, and tranquility are not possible to attain without some sort of spiritual orientation. When man follows Divine Guidance, he becomes free from any fear for the present or the future, and any grief or sorrow for the past (*khauf* and *huzn* in the Qur'anic terminology).

According to the Qur'anic teachings, it is *shirk* (assigning partners to Allah) and *kufr* (repudiation and disbelief in Allah) that causes *fasad* (colossal wrongness) across the world — the corruption and disorder in which people indulge in this world, an active perversity which degrades things and depraves men. *Iman* (staunch religious belief), on the contrary, grants a believer serenity of spirit and heart, resultant upon faith and prayer, the awareness of the Divine sufficiency and inner tranquility. A truly believing and practicing Muslim experiences in his heart *sakinah* (the *Scheehinah* of the Old Testament), the token of Divine Presence and the peace it brings with it. Needless to say, true faith and belief also entails ceaseless vigil on purity of motive and inner integrity.

Dr. Israr Ahmad, the author of this tract, firmly believes that the deep trouble and distress in today's world may have a simple cause that we humans — and we must also add, we Muslims too — have not properly obeyed God's essential instructions and thereby have missed our main goal. In his own modest way, Dr. Israr Ahmad has been actively busy in propagating and disseminating the Qur'anic message for the last twenty years. The present tract is based on a speech which he delivered on several occasions at well-attended meetings of students and general public with the sole purpose of calling people back to the Qur'an. I pray to the Almighty that this humble effort may serve the purpose of bringing entire humanity in the fold of genuine religious fellowship.

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I shall deal with the topic of "The Qur'an and World Peace" at three different levels, viz., the peace and tranquility of an individual person, the socio-political peace of a group, and finally, world peace.

An Individual Person's Peace and Tranquility

One may be surprised that I am embarking upon a discussion of world peace by first mentioning an individual's personal peace and inner state of harmony. But a moment's reflection will be sufficient to bring home to the reader the all-important truth that the most effective factor in establishing world peace is personal peace and mental satisfaction of an individual. This is so because of the following four reasons:

Firstly, an individual human being is the basic unit of humanity. A wall, however high and long it may be, is after all a complex of bricks. Its strength and stability depends on the strength and good quality of individual bricks. Similarly world peace is unthinkable without the spiritual and psychological peace of a large majority of its inhabitants.

Secondly, man in himself is a "miniature universe" and as such his consciousness reflects the entire cosmos. This important truth has been fully realized by the Sufis of Islam — the greatest researchers into human psychology. That is the reason why I have chosen their term — "miniature universe" or microcosm — to express my meaning.

Just as external and environmental happenings influence the inner state of man, it is equally true that man also influences the macro-cosmic physical universe around him. His inner state affects and brings about changes in the vast expanses of the material cosmos. Therefore, the peace and tranquility enjoyed by human individuals necessarily makes its impression on the outer world. In other words, the subjective peace experienced within makes harmony possible in the world outside the individual.

Thirdly, even a cursory glance at world history is enough to show that often the personal disquietude of a few individuals led to disastrous wars resulting in widespread bloodshed and destruction. If we study closely the life-history and personalities of leaders like Hulagu Khan, Genghis Khan, Hitler and Mussolini, we come to know that it was due to their mental disquietude and perversity that the world peace was shattered and innumerable innocent human beings were savagely killed.

Fourthly, even now if we consider for a moment the few persons in whom tremendous powers are vested (such as those who reside in the White House and the Kremlin), we will be assured that world peace largely depends upon the inner peace and tranquility of these very few individuals. Not to speak of mental disruption, even the nervous tension or anxiety of a single one of these men might spark off an extremely devastating nuclear war.

Iman — Doctrinal Belief

Viewed from this angle, Islam seems to occupy a unique position in the community of world religions. *Iman* is the collective term for all those beliefs on which the Islamic faith is based. The root of the word *Iman* is *a-m-n*, which points to the peace and tranquility that the believer enjoys in his heart as a result of entertaining and upholding these beliefs.

The quintessence of *Iman* is belief in Almighty God, or *Iman billah*, which is constituted by intuitive knowledge of Allah (SWT) and a relationship to Him of hope and total dependence and submission. Only this type of personal and subjective relationship with Allah (SWT) can engender true and lasting peace in the heart of a man, providing a positive and durable ground for the stability of his inner being. *Tauheed* — oneness of God, which we translate as "unity" or "unityism" — is the characteristic term for this pure spiritual relation of a man to his Creator, which ultimately leads him to a state described by the Qur'an in these words: "Allah became pleased with them and they became pleased with Him" (Al-Bayyinah 97:8). This is a state in which the Creator and the worshipper are in total consonance with each other. A believer who has obtained this spiritual height is completely free from all anxiety and fear, and his mind and heart experience a bliss which can be felt but cannot be described in words.

In Surah Al-An'am, Allah (SWT) first poses a question in this manner

> …Which of the two parties has more right to security and peace, (tell me) if you know. (Al-An'am 6:82)

and then the answer is supplied thus

> It is those who believed and did not pollute their faith with *zulm*, that are truly in security and are rightly guided. (Al-An'am 6:83)

In short, true belief in Allah (SWT) is the sole positive and real ground for a man's inner peace and happiness. This devotional relationship with Allah (SWT) accompanied with pure and resolute submission to His commands can be achieved and enhanced by remembrance of Allah (or *zikr*). The Qur'an says

> Verily, in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find peace and satisfaction. (Ra'd 13:28)

A person who is deprived of belief in Almighty Allah (SWT) can never enjoy even the semblance of mental peace. As a result of this lack of belief, he is always obsessed by ever-growing worldly ambitions. He is ever entangled in the blinding cobweb of his limitless desires. Most men die before seeing their desires and ambitions materialized, no better than travelers in the desert pursuing a mirage, whereas the more intelligent of these fall prey to assorted mental aberrations. Their minds become arenas of strife and conflicts. Their desires lead them to intense internal conflicts and frustrations and consequently they are transformed into infernos — their hearts set ablaze. These inner disruptions manifest themselves outwardly, giving rise not only to a ruthless and savage struggle for existence but also to vile competition, the use of unfair means in business and trade, greed, caprice, and false ostentation. As a result of all this, God's earth becomes rampant with immorality, crime, corruption, and lawlessness.

At this stage, only belief in the Hereafter, which is a corollary of belief in Allah (SWT), comes to rescue a man from the abysmal depths of darkness. It provides an effective check against corruption and immoral conduct. The eschatological beliefs in bodily resurrection, the Day of Judgment, and reward and punishment in a future life, provide a powerful incentive to a believer not to omit his duties, to be content with his lawful rights, and to abide by the rules laid down in the Divine Law (*Shari'ah*) regulating the conduct of his terrestrial existence. The Qur'an asserts unequivocally that there is only one psychological factor which can effectively keep man from transgression and immorality, and that is the belief in the Hereafter and in accountability on the Day of Reckoning.

> Indeed not! Man behaves rebelliously for he deems himself to be independent. (But) towards your Lord indeed is the return. (Al-Alaq 96: 6-8)

It should be crystal clear from the above that it is impossible to have serenity of heart if we do not have a staunch belief in religious truths. Any scheme or plan of action geared towards bringing about world peace and harmony, if not based on the belief in Almighty Allah (SWT) and in the Day of Reckoning, is bound to fail. It can succeed only if it is based upon the tenets of Islamic faith.

Islam

As stated above, *Iman* or religious belief is essentially related with the inner realm and mental state of a person, and the internal peace and calm enjoyed by him is its greatest fruit. The external manifestation of this inner peace takes the form of an attitude towards life known as *Islam*, which in turn guarantees outer peace and harmony. *Iman* and *Islam* are indeed like the two sides of a single picture. Whereas one provides guarantee for inner peace and happiness, the other does so for external peace and harmony. The Holy Prophet's (SAW) prayer which he used to say at the sight of a new moon every month contains a significant allusion to this very truth. The prayer, couched in simple but beautiful words, reads:

> O Lord! Make this new moon full of glad tidings for us: of peace, *Iman,* well-being, and *Islam*

These truths were expressed more fully and explicitly in other traditions of the Prophet (SAW). For example, in one tradition he negated *Iman* (and swore thrice to emphasize it) in a person whose neighbor is not safe from his misbehavior. Secondly, morally wholesome behavior was regarded as the zenith of both *Iman* and *Islam*. Thirdly, the Prophet (SAW) defined a Muslim as one from whose hands and tongue other Muslims are safe. Fourthly, he preached in a very wide and general way to "take pity on the inhabitants of earth, if you wish that the Lord of the heavens takes pity on you."

Socio-Political Peace and Well-Being —*Salamah*

Human beings are gregarious by nature. Their relationships with each other assume the form of ever-widening circles. Starting from the interactions within the family nucleus, they develop to encompass clans, tribes, complex social systems, and political states. Quite logically, world peace lies in the amicability and cordiality of relations between these states because the world is, after all, nothing but a large multitude of these socio-culturaI groups and states. The internal harmony of a single group bears the same analogy to the peace of the total world as the inner serenity (i.e., *Iman*) of a person bears to the external well-being (i.e., *Islam*). That is why Islam has put the greatest emphasis on social peace and political and economic justice. As delineated by the Holy Prophet (SAW), the character-traits of a Muslim individual, which is the basic unit of Muslim social polity, are the highest ideals of human character ever envisaged by any moral philosopher. One can well imagine the tranquility enjoyed at the social level by a community that is founded on such noble principles and whose members are so considerate, affectionate, and benevolent among themselves.

The Islamic social structure is established on the positive foundation of *Al-hubb fillah* — love for the sake of Allah (SWT) and in obedience to Him. Peace and well-being are its marks of distinction. That is why sincerity and companionship of two Muslims for the sake of Allah (SWT) is regarded by Him as the most excellent of religious virtues. This very attitude is amply

reflected in the way people greet each other in the Islamic society by wishing each other peace and well-being. *Assalamo Alaikum* and *Wa Alaikum Assalam* are the cheering phrases constantly uttered and heard when Muslims meet and part with each other. The Holy Prophet (SAW) described these twin characteristics of a typical Islamic society in one of his sayings thus:

> (O Muslims!) You will never enter Paradise unless you are believers. And you will never achieve genuine belief unless you love (and respect) each other. Shall I not tell you the way you can create love amongst yourselves? (That way lies in) frequently greeting each other with *salam*. (Reported by Abu Hurairah and narrated by Imam Muslim)

A major portion of the Surah of the Holy Qur'an entitled Al-Hujurat, revealed in Madinah, contains meticulously detailed instructions that help to maintain social harmony and well-being. Respectful behavior towards the leader and elders, in manner, voice, and demeanor, are the bonds and cement of an organized community. Rumors should be tested and selfish impatience should be curbed by discipline. Scandal or slander of all kinds should be condemned. All quarrels and differences should be patched up and reconciled, by the force of the community if necessary, but with perfect fairness and justice. Ridicule, taunts, and biting words should be avoided, whether the person spoken of is present or absent. Suspicion and spying are unworthy of believers. Mutual respect and confidence are a duty and a privilege in Islam. One can well imagine how much importance Islam assigns to social peace by enjoining upon Muslims to shun anything which corrodes it.

More than that, the Holy Qur'an delineates such golden principles of social and group life which cannot be found in any other religious book. For example:

> …help one another in righteousness and piety, but do not help one another in sin and wickedness…. (Al-Ma'idah 5:2)

> O believers! Stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses for the sake of Allah, even (if this may go) against yourselves, or your parents, or your kin…. (Al-Nisa 4:135)

> O believers! Stand out firmly for Allah, as witnesses for the sake of justice, and let not the enmity of a people cause you to turn away from justice. Do justice, for that is closer to piety…. (Al-Ma'ida 5:8)

> We have surely sent our messengers with clear signs (i.e., miracles and proofs), and sent with them the Book (i.e., revealed guidance) and the Balance (i.e., the *Shari'ah*), so that mankind may stand by justice…. (Al-Hadeed 57:25)

The above verses of the Qur'an make it clear that the four fundamental principles of Islamic polity are righteousness, piety, justice, and fairness. The sole aim before a truly Islamic society should be to achieve these so that people live in peace and harmony.

World Peace

As far as I can understand, Islam has two schemes to offer for the promotion of peace: (a) a real and long-term scheme, and (b) a short-term or interim one.

As regards the real, durable, and universal scheme to bring about peace on earth, Islam asserts emphatically and unambiguously that it can be achieved only through responding to the call of Islam, by believing in Allah (SWT) as the Creator and Sustainer of the universe and submitting to His will as expressed in the last Divine Revelation, i.e., the Holy Qur'an. A true Islamic society has the potential to expand and take the entire world into its fold, and thus to save all human beings from exploitation, disruption, oppression, and disquietude. The

vicissitudes of human history are witness to the fact that whenever humanity adopted an ideology and way of life other than Islam, the world was torn by injustice and warfare. The Holy Qur'an says:

> Have you not seen how your Lord dealt with the Ad, of the (city of) Iram with lofty pillars, the like of whom were not created in (all) the land? And with the Thamud, who cut out (huge) rocks in the valley? And with Pharaoh of Stakes? They were those who had committed great excesses in the lands, and spread great mischief in them. (Al-Fajr 89:6-12)

Thus, the main emphasis of Islam is on calling the entire humankind towards faith in its Lord and Creator, and urging it to submit to His Will. Indeed, the real way to establish lasting peace on earth is the following: First of all, a true Islamic society and a genuine Islamic State needs to be established in one part of the world; this would act as a beacon, inviting the humankind towards the light of *Iman* and Islam. As a result, the boundaries of Islamic society and Islamic State would keep on expanding till the entire humanity would come within the fold of the love, benevolence and mercy of its Creator.

Under the present circumstances, however, this seems like a far-fetched idea. But Islam has a message of peace, love, and harmony for the interim period as well. Islam provides us with two cardinal principles, on the basis of which the peoples of the world can be united in global harmony. Thus, the *ayah* 13 of Surah Al-Hujurat reads:

> O mankind! We created you from a single (pair of a) male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, so that you may know each other. Verily the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is (one who is) the most righteous of you.... (Al-Hujurat 49:13)

Here the Holy Qur'an mentions two points which can create a deep sense of unity among the diverse races and religio-cultural groups of the world, viz., the unity of the Creator which leads us to the essential equality of humankind, and the common origin of the entire human race in the primordial pair of Adam and Eve, which leads us to the idea of universal brotherhood.

This *ayah* addresses all of humanity and not just the Muslim community. All humankind has descended from the first couple, Adam and Eve. Their tribes, races, and nations are conventional labels by which we may know their differing characteristics. Before Allah (SWT) they are all one, and the most righteous is the most honorable. Allah (SWT) is the Creator of all human beings and as such they are all equal before Him.

These two principles of unity of the human race and oneness of Creator may appear rather theoretical, but history tells us that the Prophet of Islam (SAW) established a society based on these very principles which was free of internal strife and conflict. Even H. G. Wells, who otherwise is a bitter critic of the personal life of the Holy Prophet (SAW), acclaims that it was a great feat of Muhammad (SAW) that he, in fact, established a human society based on the lofty moral ideals of Islam.

Everybody knows that modern science and technology has brought about fantastic changes in contemporary life. Our globe has shrunk tremendously; we can travel from one corner of the earth to another in a matter of hours. The world has been reduced to a village, various countries being like localities of a single town. But this elimination of distance is entirely a physical and outer phenomenon. Mentally and psychologically, the various nations of the world are still far apart from each other. Even though at the political level men aspire to

develop a universal brotherhood and a single world-State, yet in reality they cannot find a basis or value through which to overcome the barriers of color, creed, and race.

The desire for world peace and cordial relations among the nations of the world led to the formation of "League of Nations" in the early part of this century. But it failed miserably and ceased to exist after a few years because of the utterly selfish and inhuman attitude of some of the member countries. The yearning for peace and amicability in international relations persisted and it again resulted in the formation of a world body known as the "United Nations Organization." It is an open secret, however, that it too has failed to achieve its purpose. Most resolutions passed by the UNO are not implemented in clear defiance of its Charter. Even though it has a prestigious paraphernalia of offices and divisions, its efficacy as a custodian of peace has never been up to the mark.

If we look at the matter from the right perspective, we realize that only Islam can meet the challenge of the time. The failure of peace-making world bodies like the UNO lies in the fact that these cannot possibly offer a ground for treating various national and ethnic groups as equal partners in the community of nations. Islam, on the other hand, gives us two such fundamental concepts which alone can bind the human race in one single totality. It tells us that all human beings living on the surface of this earth come from one primordial pair — Adam and Eve — and as such they are like members of one family. Again, the Creator of all is Allah (SWT) and as such they are all equal in His sight. White people have no superiority over colored nations, nor have Western nations any ground to boast against the Eastern ones. Islam totally negates all baseless values and attitudes which treat some people as inferior to others in any respect whatsoever.

The contents of the above mentioned *ayah* of Surah Al-Hujurat have appeared in reverse order in the first *ayah* of Surah Al-Nisa thus:

> O mankind! Be mindful of your Guardian-Lord Who created you from a single person. Created, of like nature, his mate and from them twain scattered countless men and women. Be mindful of Allah through Whom you demand (your mutual rights), and (be mindful of violating relations based on) the wombs; for Allah ever watches over you. (Al-Nisa 4:1)

All our mutual rights and duties, according to Islam, are referred to Allah (SWT). We are His creatures; His will is the standard and measure of good, and our duties are measured by our conformity to His Will. The Prophet of Islam (SAW) has not only shown a way to salvation in a future life, but has also brought practical answers to the problems of this-worldly life. And surely we do need concrete facts. In today's situation of crisis the call for renewal, change, and progress is heard everywhere. The Prophet Muhammad (SAW) is the prime example of a personality who understood how to bring about revolutionary progress and build a community of true brotherhood. For example, his address on the occasion of the Farewell Pilgrimage epitomizes the climax of his mission, in which he said: "An Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab, nor has a non-Arab over an Arab. You are all born of Adam, and Adam was made out of clay." This universalism is also depicted subtly in the above cited Qur'anic *ayaat*; both address all humanity and thus make explicit the fundamental facts shared by all human beings.

The role of an important pillar of Islam, *Hajj*, is also very significant in this context. The spirit of *Hajj* is the spirit of sacrifice of vanities, dress and personal appearance, pride relating to birth, national origin, accomplishments, work or social status. It signifies the brotherhood of all

Muslims, demonstrated in the greatest of all international assemblies. The privileged cast away their arrogance and pride because they know it is a sin to be harsh or scornful to one's bother. In bridging the gap between man and man, forgiveness (which is closely related with *taqwa*) plays an essential part. Magnanimity is a sign of strength.

Obviously, Qur'anic teachings can give lead to the rest of the world on the question of race relations. Islam has the best record of racial tolerance. Its mosque and pilgrimage gatherings have known no racial discrimination. The message of Islam has completely rejected racial prejudice or superiority of one race over the other. Even the western non-Muslim scholars admit this, the historian Arnold Toynbee among them. He writes:

> The extinction of race consciousness as between Muslims is one of the outstanding moral achievements of Islam, and in the contemporary world there is, as it happens, a crying need for the propagation of this Islamic virtue. The forces of racial toleration, which at present seem to be fighting a losing battle in a spiritual struggle of immense importance to mankind, might still regain the upper hand if any strong influence militating against racial consciousness were now to be thrown into the scales. It is conceivable that the spirit of Islam might be the timely reinforcement which would decide this issue in favor of tolerance and peace. (A. J. Toynbee, *Civilization an Trial*, Oxford university Press, 1948, pp. 205-6)

The disregard of color and race in the Muslim world is expressed by Malcolm X in a moving account of his experiences in Makkah. He wrote:

> For the past week, I have been utterly speechless and spellbound by the graciousness I see displayed at around me by people of all colors…. You may be shocked by these words coming from me. But on this pilgrimage, what I have seen and experienced, has forced me to rearrange much of my thought patterns previously held, and to toss aside some of my previous conclusions…. Perhaps if White Americans could accept in reality the Oneness of mankind - and cease to measure and hinder and harm others in terms of their "differences" in color, …. Each hour here in the Holy Land enables me to have greater spiritual insight into what is happening in American between black and white.

It is most unfortunate that, to the total neglect of such magnificent teachings of universal brotherhood, Muslims themselves are taking to various secular slogans for uniting cross-sections of the world population on the basis of racial and national loyalties. It is height of insanity that people who produced the finest examples of human equality and brotherhood in their past on the basis of their faith alone are now adopting racial and ethnic nationalism as a panacea for their social and political ills. To give an historical example, Omar Ibn Al-Khattab (RAA) who belonged to the respectable Arab tribe of Quraish and was the head of the then largest Muslim State of his time, used to address Bilal (RAA) — a black Muslim and a former slave of humble means — as *Sayyidina* (our master).

The upshot of my discussion is that the truth which is essential for the happiness and peace (of both individual as well as social at the widest level) is all there and complete in the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* (i.e., the tradition and practice of the Prophet SAW). Whoever amongst Muslims studies the Holy Qur'an and the life of Prophet of Islam (SAW) in earnest must face the question: "Are you ready to follow the heights that Allah (SWT) shows you and be a witness to this unto the world?" I believe that the need of the hour is to explain and spread the teachings and wisdom of the Holy Qur'an, first among the Muslims themselves and then among the entire humankind. This can be achieved only through sincere and tireless efforts of

those young men who decide to dedicate their lives for learning and teaching the Book of Allah (SWT).